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MEMOIRS OF THE COMB FAMILY

BY

Lorna Comb

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Ft. Wayne, Indiana

MEMOIRS OF THE COMB FAMILY

2219188



The widow and children of Scottish immigrant James Comb gather for a family portrait taken around 1910.

Bottom row from left to right: John, Annie Bunton, James' widow Jessie, Kate Irwin and James Jr.

Upper row from left to right: Lottie McDonald, Alexander Maitland, Isabel (Belle) Stewart, George, Jessie Hotton and Maggie Snyder.

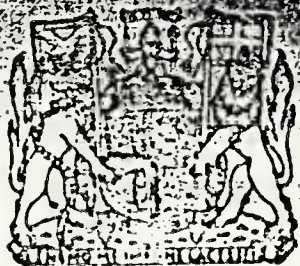
Missing: Lizzie Eccelstone was living in Guelph, Ontario at the time of the photograph, and David Comb was living in Minneapolis.

My name is Lorna Mingay Comb. I came to know the Comb family stories through my husband, Alexander Maitland, who heard them as a boy from his father as the two rode their bakery cart through the streets of Sault St. Marie, Michigan. I've been thinking that all of you who knew the family well would like to remember them and those of you who didn't would like to find out about them, so I wrote down these stories for you to keep. I tried to avoid the autobiographical and hope you will forgive any inaccuracies or omissions. They were inadvertent.

Sincerely,

Lorna Mingay Comb





And then

EXTRACT OF AN ENTRY

IN A REGISTER KEPT AT THE GENERAL REGISTRY OFFICE, EDINBURGH.

John Comb, Wright, Portsburgh & Agnes Strachan his spouse had

Son born 13th Decemr. last named

James.

Nov 13 1845

Mein, formerly Residing in Laurieston, Edinburgh, and while residing there did, on the thirteenth September, Eighteen hundred and forty-five give birth to a Male illegitimate child, of which child, James Coal Merchant, now Residing at No. 4 Sempie Street, Edinburgh, is admitted father, and which child was on the twenty-sixth September Eighteen hundred and forty-two, or thereabout baptised by the Rev Robert Ferguson, Minister of Saint David, by the name of

EXTRACTED from the REGISTER OF BIRTHS and BAPTISMS for

the Parish of St. Cuthberts

in the County of Edinburgh

GIVEN at the GENERAL REGISTRY OFFICE, NEW REGISTER HOUSE,

EDINBURGH, under the Seal of the said Office, the 25th

James, Coal Merchant, Residing at No.4, Sempie Street, Parish of Saint Cuthberts, and Margaret Glen, his spouse, had a Son born to them, at No.2, Newport Street, same Parish, on the sixteenth April Eighteen hundred and forty-nine Named James Glen.

Baptised on the twenty-seventh May, eighteen hundred and forty-nine, by the Revd. George Johnston, Nicolson Street, while officiating for the Revd. Wm. Reid, Lothian Road,

James, Coal Merchant, Residing at No. 4 Sempie Street, Parish of Saint Cuthberts, and Jessie Oliver, his spouse, by a second Marriage had a Daughter born to him at No.4 Sempie Street on the twenty-May, Eighteen hundred and fifty-two Named Elizabeth.
Baptised on the eleventh July, Eighteen hundred and fifty-two, by the Revd. Wm. Reid.

James, Coal Merchant, Residing at No.4 Sempie Street, Parish of Saint Cuthberts, and Jessie Oliver, his spouse by a second Marriage had a Daughter born to them at No.4 Sempie Street, on the first July, Eighteen hundred and fifty-four Named Margaret Scott.
Baptised on the sixteenth July, Eighteen hundred and fifty-four, by the Revd. Wm. Reid.

Love to the Davis's

4th May 1886

My dear Robert

I am happy to say that the rest are all
 pretty good health, Mother is often com-
 plaining of a thymus in her right lung but
 however, Annie is preparing to come to
 Quilby for the summer, she is going to
 stay with deyer, you will likely see her
 before you come. John has brought out
 the other day his rushing business.
 I shall be attending the boat's tinkering
 well and deyer, bright from the boat
 through the door, George is (Chief Engineer
 on the big yacht) is doing well. Dave
 is working at the carpenter's trade. I have
 2 dollars a day. I'll do this is leaving a home
 of deyer well. I'll do this is at the High School
 hoping to see you soon. I will be glad to
 join in kind love to you.
 I remain your loving Mother & Cora

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 hoping to see you soon. I will be glad to
 join in kind love to you.
 I remain your loving Mother & Cora

meet on Earth you may all meet in a fair level floor up to the neck and right
that happy land, for, for every person on the right of god's side in it that day
seconds will meet to part no more. It for fourteen days & nights I could
sit together. Well Robert I am writing never be down & I was never out for
this in time as long as I know you will be 3 months, & the fair was as full as
be at the same steps, for I don't like never cease & I actually thought it was
to write to them necessary, but I hope just one out of my reason, but I
you will get this one all right, but it happy to say that the fair is all over
will not be long one, I have to write tomorrow well I will keep that decision
under a very great disadvantage for I will see you have made up your
have lost the light of the right eye, & I mind again to say as a last hope
there is a white beam all over the light you will get fair to the world
but the right must still be as good as any this time you have the lamp then is
under it for I am still given where the rays of light from the
lamp is shining at night but it is very faint summer & full of sun
now, from God, I had an awful wind & I was very much
of it I had operations on my eye & then I was the best trip he was
and an acting on the ball of the eye
but what was left to keep the eye from
from going into the other, I was
breathing a piece of Paul & then
a small spark of it and I was then

15 Aug. Well Robert I will try & I will
this now, altho I have not a great deal
more to say & I don't get very much
writing, I have been rather busy
the head over since my eye got better

The history of the Combs began in Scotland in the early 19th Century. In 1805, John Comb, a carpenter, and his wife Agnes Strachan gave birth to a son they named James.* James lived in Portsburgh, an Edinburgh suburb, and when he grew up he moved to the city and became a successful coal merchant. He owned a mine and a fleet of donkeys and carts which delivered coal to Edinburgh's residents. In 1842, James became the father of an illegitimate child, Robert. James admitted his paternity and probably contributed to Robert's support. James' concern for Robert is demonstrated in a letter he wrote to him near the end of his life in 1886. A copy of the letter is enclosed.

By 1849, James had married Margaret Glen and had four children, who all died before they were two. The next child, James Glen lived but his mother did not. Margaret Glen died the next year at 39.

James remarried to Jessie Oliver and in 1852 they produced a daughter Elizabeth who was later called Lizzie. Two years later Jessie Oliver gave birth to another daughter, Margaret, named after James' first wife. Kate was born a little over a year later.

At this time, the New World was being heavily advertised in Scotland and James grew interested.

*There is no exact proof that James Comb's parents were the John and Agnes who reported the birth of a son James to them on December 13, 1805, but the absence of any other James Comb in that generation makes their parentage likely.

To many of his day, it seemed a land of unlimited opportunity where every risk would pay off. Perhaps James longed to imitate Scotland's landed gentry in a country in which land was not scarce.

At any rate, James sold his mine and his fleet of donkeys and carts and set sail for the New World with his wife Jessie, his son James, and his daughters Lizzie and Maggie and the infant Kate. James had the burning ambition to become a gentleman farmer and \$75,000 in a moneybelt to help him realize his dream.

Although he was a city boy who knew nothing about farming, James was certain that the same ambition and tenacity which earned him a fortune in Scotland would make him a farming success. Others were skeptical. On board ship the captain told James, " If you're smart you'll throw the moneybelt overboard and go back to Scotland."

Some of James' fellow passengers later became famous. The Muirs, Duffields and McMillans all came over on that ship and became the old money of Detroit. James' best friend, Alexander Maitland was also on board. Maitland went on to Ishpeming, Ontario, and made a fortune in iron ore. He was later given two special tributes. An ore carrier that sailed the Great Lakes for many years was named the Alexander Maitland, as was James' first son born in America. The name continues in the family today.

It was at Guelph, Ontario, that James chose to settle. He built a large house which eventually accommodated 11 children and bought all the finest cattle and stocked the farm with them.

Lottie, Alexander Maitland, Jessie, David, Annie and Isabel were born in these years and increased the demand on James' dwindling resources. And luck was unkind. One year an epidemic swept through the farm and killed all the cattle and the next year there was a drought and the crops were totally destroyed. Circumstances in Guelph looked bleak, but still determined to make a success, James moved his family to Pointe Au Pins, pronounced Point of Par. Only Lizzie, who married John Eccelstone, stayed behind in Guelph.

In Pointe Au Pins, James bought a section of rich land and toiled night and day with his five sons to clear it. They did back breaking labor planting a variety of crops and were rewarded with a beautiful harvest. However, they were so isolated from lucrative markets that they could find no place to sell their harvest. Finally, after years of bitter discouragement and with most of his fortune gone, James' gave up the land and moved to Sault St. Marie, Michigan. James Jr. made the move to the Sault, but later returned to Guelph, where we lost track of him.

The other children were left to the task of finding odd jobs to support themselves and their ailing father. John became a farmer and settled outside the Sault with his wife Sarah and their three daughters. David married in the Sault and then moved to Minneapolis where he had six daughters and five sons. The daughters were named: Eva, Ruth, Rachel, Grace, Katherine and Annabel; and the boys were named: Fred, John, James, David and Will.

George married but his wife was an invalid and they never had any children. George was a genial man who could get along with everybody and he ran a popular rink in the Sault for many years. The rink was open for ice skating and hockey in the winter and roller skating in the summer. As an older man, George was elected mayor of the Sault.

Alexander Maitland (Mait) found his first job as a water carrier. He drew casks from the crystal pure St. Marys River and delivered it to the Sault's thirsty residents. Next, he found a cooking post on a tugboat and discovered he enjoyed baking so much that he wanted to make it his business. So he set up a bakery on the main street in the Sault, Ashmun Street, and called it Comb's Candy Kitchen. He married Millie George of Port Elgin, Ontario.

All of James' daughters married. Lizzie had married in Guelph and her closest sibling, Maggie married Jim Ritchie not long after they moved to the Sault. Maggie had tow sons and two daughters: Mabel and Jessie. Years later, Maggie remarried and became Maggie Snyder. Her daughter Mabel married Jay Edward and stayed in the Sault for many years, but later moved to Tuscon, Arizona. Mabel had two children, a daughter in Colorado, and a son Paul who is a captain on an ore carrier in the Great Lakes. Maggie's daughter Jessie married Ertel and later divorced him and married La Plante.

James' daughter Kate married John Irwin and they adopted a daughter Gertrude. Lottie became Lottie McDonald and had a

daughter, Pearl, and a son Jack and possibly other children. Lottie died young while her children still lived at home.

Jessie married Andrew Hotton and had a son Ralph and two daughters; Fern, and Marrion, who married Tom Skitch.

Annie married John Bunton and had a son Clifton and a daughter Madeline. Madeline married Perce Gemmill and had a daughter Ann Marie.

Isabel, James' youngest daughter married Robert Stewart. They had a daughter Dorothy who married John Tyler.

But back at the time his children were getting themselves established, James was a sick man. He died not too long after 1886 when he wrote the letter to his son Robert.

After her husband died, Grandma Jessie continued to live with Kate and her husband John Irwin. I remember Grandma Jessie as the dearest white haired old lady you ever knew. In 1912, Grandma Jessie died and was missed very much. Her son Maitland had a gold ring created which he inscribed, " Mother: 1825-1912" and he wore it constantly until his death in 1943. He then passed it on to his son Maitland who passed it on to his son Maitland.

Maitland was making a success at the bakery. In one half of the bakery bread was sold, three loaves for a quarter. In the other half was an old fashioned ice cream parlour with wire backed chairs and matching tables. Maitland Jr. remembered that every day when he came home from high school it was his job to freeze five gallons of ice cream.

Maitland Sr. and his wife Millie had a big family and a horse, Maud and a cow, and they all lived on Dawson Street. The children's names were: Olive, Ruby, George, Willis, Maitland, Kenneth, Raymond and Walter.

With so many kids, the house usually bustled with noise and excitement. The children grew up boisterous and with a good appreciation of humor. The little hellraisers were quite a trial to their maid, Ida, who had a hair lip and a cleft palate. The kids would chase each other around the kitchen with their hockey sticks while poor Ida was trying to prepare dinner. She would get so vexed that she would say in as threatening tone as she could muster, " You thids get your nockey thicks out of my kishen." Somehow, she never managed to scare them.

About this time, Maitland Jr. begged his father to teach him how to milk the cow. From that time on, it became his special unasked-for chore. Volunteerism could be dangerous in so large a family with so much to do.

One year, the pastor of the Comb's Presbyterian church, J.A. Kennedy, sent Dad Comb on a trip to Chicago to buy seats for the new church on Bigham Avenue. When he came home Dad Comb brought Mait a violin and Ruby a mandolin and other instruments for the other children. Soon they all became musicians and years later when Clarence Bemer came to teach high school in the Sault and married Ruby, he thought up the idea of a family orchestra. Clarence Bemer was the director and pianist, Mait played the violin, Kenneth played the saxophone, Walter played the clarinet, Louis Levine played the trombone,

George played the drums and Raymond played the trumpet. They created bedlam in the house during practice time and had a lot of fun doing it.

All the kids helped in the bakery. Ruby is remembered as a character and a jokester and one incident while working in the bakery typified her. As she was putting a customer's bread in a paper bag, one of the loaves slipped and hit the floor. Quick as a wink, Ruby snatched up the dirty loaf and said to the lady, with an extremely straight-faced expression, " It's a good thing it didn't hit the floor."

By 1908, the bakery needed more room to expand so Dad Comb opened a second bakery on the corner of Portage and Glen Avenues. The store was placed near Kemp's dock so it could serve the ore boats as they passed by. When he opened the second bakery, Dad Comb sold the house on Dawson Street and moved his family to the enormous flat upstairs from the bakery. The flat consisted of six bedrooms and a host of other rooms and had no trouble accommodating eight children.

The whole family had fun together. I knew all the Combs as children and remember them as a constantly merry bunch. There was always something to do at their house.

You see, it was unique growing up in a small town like the Sault. Everybody knew everybody and your life centered around church and school activities. All the Comb boys took turns pumping the church organ until it became electric. We attended church in amounts unheard of today. There was Sunday school and church in the morning, then our youth group-Christian Endeavor,

and church again in the evening. I remember how silly we got in church after Christian Endeavor in spite of our manners. Our youth group always sat together and we always seemed to have something to giggle about.

We were ingenious at having fun. We lived in an isolated region of firs and birches whose weather was described by Sault veterans as 10 months of winter and two months of poor sleighing, yet we didn't seem to mind. On Saturdays in the coldest months of winter we would get a group together and take the trolley car to the end of the line at Algonquin. From there we would snowshoe six miles to Helen Feetham's parent's cabin where we ate our potluck dinners. Of course we were chaperoned by our teachers. Propriety just had to be maintained. Then in the spring, groups from school would row out to Easterday's cottage and have the most marvelous picnics. The cottage was located on Steere's Island across from the country club.

George Comb's rink was the second most important social spot outside of church and school. Two or three nights a week we would walk to the rink in 17 degree below weather, all excited and ready to see and be seen. George Lockwood ran a mechanical organ and boys would ask girls to skate a certain number with them. The girls kept a dance book so we could remember what number we had promised to what boy. I can remember gliding over the ice in the frosty air with the organ grinding.

Unfortunately it often stuck on one note as it got older. I skated repeatedly to, " By the light, light, light, light, light of the silvery moon".

Wednesday nights once a month were special at the rink. The city band came and everybody got out to skate. You always had a partner on those nights, and if lucky, your intermissions were filled too.

Skating and snowshoeing weren't our only sports. We were fearless tobogganers. After a long walk we would reach the top of Cody's Hill and rocket down. Sometimes we would hit a bump so hard that we would spring so hard over the crossbars that it hurt.

We kept warm in the icy winter with a coal stove when I was a child. Later we bought a furnace, but we always had to wear long underwear. I hated it. It was clingy and itchy and after several days' wear it would stretch embarrassingly. We had to fold it over to keep it from showing. And I'll never forget the relieved feeling when I took it off in the spring.

Summer was another matter. It could get as hot as 90 degrees. Usually the barometer hovered in the 70's, but when it was hot you knew it. Alf Richards was our ice man and he delivered the big ice chunks from door to door. He had cut the blocks in winter and surrounded them with sawdust to keep them from melting. When he got to your door with the ice in the summer he had to hose off the sawdust. What a mess!

Summer was for swimming too. For houseparties at the Shallows, everybody would wear their woolen bathing suits.



The wool was practical as well as stylish because even in summer the Sault's water was COLD. To accompany our woolen bathingsuits with their big pleats and pantaloons that gathered at the knee, we all wore stockings, hats and shoes. The shoes were light like rubbers, but to the best of my memory, we never took them off.

In summer we saw a lot of the Indians. They lived on Sugar and Drummond Islands and used to come to town in their canoes selling the wild raspberries and strawberries they picked. The Chippewas also sold baskets of all shapes and sizes. They wove grass together and tied it together in bands which they then dyed to create elaborate colors and patterns. Our laundry basket was made by the Indians and it always smelled good because sweet grass was included with the weave.

The Indians were very poor. They would come to town burdened down by so many baskets, yet all they wanted for their beautiful wares were some old clothes. There were many Indians and some big city folk like the Detroiters thought Indians were the only ones who lived in cold upper peninsula places like the Sault. Of course they were wrong, but the Sault was definitely an Indian stomping ground. On the Canadian side you could go down the river a bit and find yourself in the legendary land of Hiawatha.

Tourists really thought the Indians were something and often took an Indian-guided canoe trip through the rapids. I guess that either the Indian's birch bark canoes were very safe, or the Indians were very skilled because I never heard

of an accident in all my years at the Sault.

The rapids are nearly all gone now because of all the locks they've built. The Weitzel Lock stood during my childhood and was later replaced with the MacArthur Lock which is big enough for foreign ships. Now there are four locks at the Sault, but only two are used.

The big boats have to travel a long route to get to the Sault and beyond. The freighters start in Buffalo and travel Lake Erie to Detroit and then loom up the Detroit River to the St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair. From there they traverse Lake Huron and Lake George before finally ending up at the Sault on the St. Marys River. There the giants wait to be let in a lock gate. Once inside, employees at both ends close the gates and the water rises 18 feet from the depth of the St. Marys River to the higher Lake Superior waterline. Then the boats often go on to Duluth. The whole roundtrip from Buffalo to Duluth takes 10 days.

By the time the family moved to Portage Avenue, the Comb kids were all big and some were in high school. Ken Comb was president of the senior class of 1916- the last class to graduate from the old high school. In high school, George Comb and Marguerite Crawford went together and often when he came home for lunch, George used to bring back a creampuff or chocolate éclair and slip it into the pocket of Marguerite;s coat.

Maitland stayed at the bakery to help his father the year after high school.

The two made a deal that if Mait would work an extra year his father would send him to college for four years. Mait agreed, but after one month he told his dad that he couldn't take the exhausting work and long hours. Dad Comb said, " Mait, try it for another month," and Mait agreed. He grew used to it and stayed the year. Then he went on to Michigan State University to become a civil engineer.

While Maitland was in college, Walter was still a shy high schooler. After high school during World War I, he joined the navy. One time, while stationed at the Great Lakes near Chicago, Walter's mother came to visit him. In those days a respectable lady never set foot in a bar, but Walter was in uniform and couldn't buy his own liquor so he persuaded his mother to buy it for him. She came back with the bottle and was shaking all over saying, " Never ask me to do that again." That just shows how much times have changed.

During the war, Marguerite attended college at Alma and George was in the navy. After the war ended, Marguerite taught in Detroit and George graduated from the Detroit College of Law. They were married in 1923.

After WWI, Maitland lived in Kalamazoo and he and a friend decided to make their own wine. Sugar was expensive then at 30 cents a pound, but they forged ahead. When he came home for Christmas, Mait proudly brought a bottle of his own vintage. His father was a teetotler and a religious man so Mait knew he had to find a special strategy to get his father to try his concoction. The huge master bedroom had a living room attached

and Dad Comb was sitting inside reading his paper when Mait walked in. Mait said slyly, " Dad, I'd like you to taste the grape juice I made," and he uncorked the bottle and the cork shot up and bounced all over the ceiling. Dad Comb looked over his paper and said politely, " No thank you".

After the war, everybody grew up and went their separate ways. Olive and Ruby had already married by 1918. Ruby married Clarence Bemmer in 1914, and later had one son Robert who lives in Phoenix, Arizona. Olive married Byran Wiggam in 1915 and later moved to Indianapolis and had three children: Byran Jr., Dorothy and Mary.

In 1919 I met Mait again. I hadn't seen him during all the years when he was at college and officer's training camp and now he was 27 and I was a cadette teacher of 21. I was skating at George Comb's rink one night when a handsome six footer in a lieutenant's uniform skated up to me and said, " Why, little Lorna Mingay's grown up!" I was impressed with Mait right away. He wasn't like the other boys I knew and he had a terrific sense of humor as well as being incredibly handsome and a good dancer. He met all of my specifications and soon I had to stop being a fickle young girl because I was in love. Mait and I were married the next year when he was 28 and I was 22. We had two children; Alexander Maitland III and Lois Ann.

In 1923, George married Marguerite Crawford and they had three sons; William, Donald and Phillip.

In 1925, Kenneth, who had trained as an engineer, married Ruby Sass and they had three daughters; Connie, Beth and Janet.

In 1928, Raymond who also trained as an engineer, married Beryl Broughton and had one daughter, Joyce.

Walter, our shy blond, was growing up all these years and followed his brothers by training as an engineer at the University of Michigan. He graduated in 1922 and started at the bottom of the ladder at Union Carbide firing the engine and was promoted constantly through the years. For one promotion, he was transferred to Niagra Falls and there he met Phyllis Chorman, who he married in 1932. He lost his shyness. Later he was transferred to Selma, Alabama and then back to New York but he stayed with Union Carbide all his life. He and Phyllis had two children; sons Gardham and Walter Jr.

Willis was the only Comb child that never married. She stayed in the Sault all her life and cared for her mother after her stroke in April 1933. Mother Comb was bedridden until she died in November 1933.

Dad Comb married again years later to Fern Baker, a nurse and friend of the family, and she took good care of him until he died in 1943.

Today the Sault is smaller than we remember it. Back then, the Canadian Sault was a growing town of 16,500 and the American Sault was similar with a population of 15,000. Now the Canadian Sault is an industrial center with 85,000 inhabitants while our Sault is settled by only 12,000 or 13,000 people, most of whom work on the locks.

Even though diminished in size, to us the Sault is still an important place because that is where we and the people we love grew up. We will remember our roots always.

Erected By
JAMES COMB
Coal Merchant, Edinburgh,
In Memory of
MARGARET GLEN
His affectionate wife,
Who departed this life
on the 22nd of Octr. 1856
in the 38th year of her age.

Also Three of his children,
MARGARET LITTLE
Who died 30th of March, 1846
Age 15 Months

JAMES MAITLAND
Who died 31st Octr. 1848
Age 8 Months

MARGARET LITTLE,
Who died 30 Octr. 1848
Age 11 Months

Also ISABELLE OLIVER
Who died

ERECTED BY JAMES COMB
PARISH CHURCH YARD, EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND



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